The Nishijin Tradition: Past and Prospects, Issues and Problems as Viewed by Various People Involved in Production and Dissemination

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Norma A. RESPICIO
University of the Philippines

Nishijin is the bastion of traditional textile production in Japan. It is an uncontested position, yet a unenviable one at this period in history, when the nation is beset with formidable political and economic problems.

This paper attempts to plot the possibilities and future directions of traditional textile production as exemplified by Nishijin, first through a review of the textile history of Nishijin and then an examination of the real score in today's production through a laying down of facts and figures and an articulation of issues and problems as viewed by people involved in the production and dissemination of textile productions in Kyoto.

A Review of History*

Nishijin is not just a place-name and a product brand-name. It is a culture-name. It traces its lineage from the Uzumasa area in northwestern Kyoto where textile weaving families that descended from the Hata clan of Chinese and Korean immigrants in A.D. 270-310 gained early prominence when they wove ceremonial cloths on the occasion of the inauguration of the Kōryūji and during the transfer and then re-transfer of the capital from Nara. Administered by the Office of Weaving, the Uzumasa area of weavers was already the undisputed center of weaving in Japan at the beginning of the Heian period.

Along with the decline of the Fujiwara rule in the later Heian period was the dissolution of the Office of Weaving, and in place were private enterprises such as the Otoneri Aya and Omiya Silk which took upon themselves the responsibility of weaving court and religious ceremonial cloths throughout the Kamakura period. The private weaving houses became the foundation of the Kyoto weaving industry and

provided the impetus towards the flowering of the industry during the Muromachi period, when Kyoto weavers were dispatched to other places in Japan to disseminate the knowledge and technology of textile weaving. The healthy development was unfortunately disrupted by a civil war or the Ōnin War that devastated Kyoto for ten years from 1467-1477 and caused many textile weavers to flee to Sakai city. The Ōnin War registered the first formidable break in the history of the weaving tradition and manifested a bitter struggle over turf on Aya weaving between two contending camps—the Nishijin Ōtoneri Kata (long known for Aya weaving) and the Higashijin (specializing in plain white silk weaves). The struggle which was finally won by the Nishijin Ōtoneri Kata assured the latter the monopoly and official shogunate protection to produce Aya figured brocade weaving. Yet the conflict also revealed for the first time a culture of "turfing" on techniques that was to be a common if not a defining character of weaving culture-areas (particularly in Nishijin) throughout history.

The busy trade exchanges within and outside Japan in the Momoyama period may have loosened up the culture of "turfing" and insecurities, and cultivated instead an environment characterized by openness and sharing. New weaving design techniques, patterns, and materials from within and outside Kyoto and Japan such as the *mon-ori* or multi-colored and multi-figured brocade weave from Ming China were imbibed and transmitted during this time. The Nishijin Ōtoneri Kata group, which was still enjoying shogunate protection, had the luxury and ease to be the first to learn more advanced techniques in figured-brocade weaving based on the Ming styles such as *kinran*, which is generally characterized by the profuse use of gold or silver threads, and the *karaori* or the Chinese-style designs and patterns that developed in noh costumes for female characters, typically of gorgeous colors and designs that feature peonies, chrysanthemums, and other flowers in alternating block-composition on trellises or on lattice ground (Yamaguchi 1993). With the enriched techniques plus the abundant availability of trade-silk, Kyoto patterns and weaving based on silk were popularized in the clothes of Japan's gentry and wealthy commoners. All the foregoing have constituted the foundation of the Nishijin design/pattern, style, and technique in textile weaving which characterize Kyoto textiles that have endured even today in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The Edo period dispensation endeavored to create a leveled playing field by disbanding the Ōtoneri Group to allow the rise of independent weaving groups in

Kyoto and outlying areas. An immediate reaction to this is a nodal mark in Japan's textile weaving history: the establishment of the Nishijin Weavers' Union which aimed to protect the members from outside competition and maintain Nishijin's lead in the industry within and without the political-administrative jurisdiction of Kyoto.

Significant in terms of weaving technology was the establishment of Takabata House which specialized in producing high quality satin, Heian court patterns, and five-color brocaded cloths for religious ceremonies using the pedal-framed loom. Yet as the Nishijin weavers endeavored to sharpen their techniques in the succeeding hundred years, the silk ban enforced by the shogunate in 1841 disrupted further advancements the second time around (the first being the Ōnin War). Textile production slowed down and the Takabata House lost government patronage and all previously bestowed privileges. A switch to cotton recouped some losses at a snail pace.

A deeper nodal mark in Japan's textile weaving history occurred during the Meiji period when the newly reinstated imperial rule enforced westernization in many aspects in the life of the people, such as fashion and technology. Textile production began to be mechanized with the introduction of the Jacquard system from France into Japan in 1873 followed by a bevy of new machines and tools, such as Battant machine, metal reed, card punching machine, pattern enlarger-plotting device, and Verdoul, among others which were promptly translated into Japanese versions. The Jacquard system with its roll of pattern cards replaced the manual pulling of design warp threads by a person seated atop the loom in the *sorabiki*. The French technology reached Kyoto in 1890 and it was gradually learned and accepted by weavers. Providing impetus to learning the new technology was the reduced clientele previously made up of the imperial family, their retinue of aristocrats and government people who were relocated to Tokyo—the new capital city from the Meiji period onwards. The Jacquard system of weaving answered the needs of the new Western fashion as well as Western interior styling. Also around this time aniline dyestuffs and chemical mordants were introduced and enriched the color spectrum of the Nishijin artisans/craftsmen. As industrialization shifted to a high gear, Nishijin craftsmen tightened their bonding under the Nishijin Union. By 1899, rules on members' discipline, system of awards and citations for exemplary productions, arbitration and amicable settlement were formulated (Yamaguchi 1993).

The Sino-Japanese War further sped up mechanized production through the use of 'power looms' of steel frames and run by electricity, but the succeeding world conflict, which saw Japan occupying countries in east and southeast Asia, caused a dissipation of production as a great number of the power looms were surrendered to the government, where they were then melted and converted into military armaments. Those that were kept were operated to produce clothing and textiles for the imperial forces. Throughout the twentieth century (Taishō-Shōwa periods) Nishijin loom artisans persisted in finding ways to improve the features of automated power looms, so that even fine quality weaves previously possible only in the *takabata* and *sorabiki* were now possible. Computerized production methods from the 1980s achieved further advances toward rapid production. Along with the power looms for velvet weaving, the Reppier type and water jet-powered Jacquard looms with their enlarged width, satisfied the increased demand for a wide variety of high quality versatile textiles for neckties, tapestries, wall hangings, curtains, and other Western-styled interior-design needs such as seat and bed upholsteries in hotels, offices, cars, and trains. Unremitting research on the properties of materials—dyestuffs and yarns, have brought about new textural fabrics and hues that endlessly charm and challenge the aesthetic sensibilities of even today's young generation. Nishijin-produced textiles, whether woven on super power looms, or semi-power looms, or in *takabata*, always have that distinctive character of fineness and density of both woven designs and woven ground. This is mainly on account of the quality of yarn used which has always been pure silk—processed silk yarn in which the protein from raw silk cocoon threads has been removed. Moreover Nishijin artist-craftsmen employ certain techniques in twisting each strand of yarn to create an enhanced fineness of Nishijin textile. Superb "fineness" could be THE VERY defining quality of Nishijin textiles which is unsurpassed by or wanting in other textile traditions. Poetic design compositions that are suggestive of the seasons and recalling Heian period literature or referring to Chinese votive objects, peonies, and mythical animals expressed in painterly manner are other distinctive features of Nishijin textiles. Yet too, there are refreshing creations though still occurring far in between. Noteworthy are: a design-theme referring to Zhou bronze vessels, yet it features only a design detail—the hooked geometric lines of thunder/lightning against striped colors of gold and oxidized green; and a design depicting the Chinese mythical pair of dragon cubs tangled in a dance—a most repeated theme in Shōsōin textiles, yet the subjects are freed from the usual roundel enclosures so that there is utmost fluidity and graceful elegance in imagery. Both designs are from the Tatsumura Kōhō Textile Company.

Nishijin Today: Facts and Figures

The nucleus area of the tradition of textile weaving at Nishijin is delineated by Rossanji in the north, Senbon-dōri in the west, Ogawa-dōri in the east, and Ichijō-dōri in the south. The wider geographic boundaries of the tradition including silk processing, dyeing, and yuzen production, extends to Kitayama-dōri in the north, Karasuma-dōri in the east, Nishioji-dōri in the west, and Marutamachi-dōri in the south.

"Nishijin in Crisis" was the title of a seven-page article written by Professor Tamara Hareven that was published in the *Kyoto Journal* of Spring 1988. That was seventeen years ago. Seventeen years ago—it must have sounded like a warning call, but for one to hear or read the same pronouncement (Hareven, 2002) today, it could be understood as either a bluff, just like the boy who cried wolf, or taken as a distress call, or just simply a preposterous call, depending on whose point of view is being considered.

Going by the facts and figures, Professor Hareven's data in 1988 noted 40-50 Nishijin textile companies that were shutting down production every year since 1983 and that the remaining ones were reducing production. The late professor's yearly figures from 1983-1988, however, have become monthly figures of companies that are terminating production operations according to the President of the Maizuru Orimono Company in a talk given at the Senryougasuji Nishijin Textile Shop in June of 2005. The statistics clearly depict not simply a slide or a smooth downturn, but a 'fall with a thud'! This is validated further in the Nishijin Textile Labor Union Report of October 2005 (Matsushita 2005). Baring the figures, Nishijin textile production was at its glorious height from 1972 to 1990 and reached a plateau sometime in 1987, when the total value of all textile productions—*obi*, *kinran*, kimono, neckties, shawls/mufflers, and interior furnishings— was recorded at 249,326,682,000 yen. The richest production year, however, was attained in 1990 with an amassed total value of 279, 462,485,000 yen. That was more than quintuple the recorded figures of 2004 which were 51, 700,406,000 yen or only 20.7 percent of the total value of production in the plateau year of 1987. On the average there was a constant decrease in the total volume of sales of Nishijin textile productions by 8.5 percent for every two-year interval from 1993 to 2004, which is a stark contrast to 9.9 percent sales growth rate for every two-year interval from 1972 to 1993. The production report of 2004 for *obi* alone, recorded an output of 780,082 rolls of *obi*, which is only 84.6

percent of the previous year's 2003 recorded output. There has been a reduction of *obi* output by an average of 160,444 rolls per year for the past three consecutive years from 2001 to 2004. The 2004 output represents a measly 9.4 percent of the recorded peak of Nishijin *obi* output in 1976 at 8,280,000 rolls. In terms of yen value the 2004 output is equivalent to 30, 987,070,000 yen or just 18.1 percent of the recorded peak in 1976, when the total *obi* output was valued at 170,000,000,000 yen.

From the 2004 statistics supplied by the Labor Union on the number of looms, there were 13,539 registered looms in Nishijin in 1987, but in 2004, there remained only 3,635 or 26.8 percent of the number of registered looms in Nishijin during the above mentioned plateau year of 1987. The foregoing however does not represent the actual number of looms in operation. According to some loom makers' estimate, as mentioned by the Labor Union officer in the October 2005 report, there are 1500 remaining looms in Nishijin with only 300 in actual operation. Yet the President of Maizuru Orimono Company has estimated a reduction of 300-400 looms in operation every year. If the latter's estimate is accurate, that would mean a complete wipe-out of looms in actual operation by October 2006. Indeed there are reasons to panic!

According to the President of the Maizuru Orimono Company, the rosy situation in Nishijin during the 1980s was greatly manifested in the proliferation of a number of banks in Nishijin during the same decade. However their number has gradually decreased these past decades and the withdrawal trend remains unabated. The same could be said about leading department stores such as Matsuzakaya, Mitsukoshi, and Takashimaya, of which their presence in the form of small stores on the big avenues of Nishijin area was very apparent, especially during Nishijin's glorious decades from 1970s to the 1980s. All have lamentably disappeared. Parallel to that, the economic downturn the past two decades has dampened the penchant for party gatherings and grand weddings so that most textile productions from Nishijin are for informal or not so formal wear and are modestly or inexpensively priced as designs have become less ostentatious—simple, few, and small-sized patterns. In contrast the upbeat economy of the 70s and 80s brought about very expensive and gorgeously-designed Nishijin kimono-*obi* productions profusely embellished with gold and silver thread, mostly for formal occasions such as grand weddings and hotel parties.

As to the salary or income of a weaver, it is reported also in the talk by the President

of the Maizuru Orimono Company that in the 1990s the income of a weaver was equal to the income of a section chief of a small company, but now (in 2005) the income has gone down considerably. It is reported that the income is now even lower than the salary of a first year employee of a small company! The data from the Maizuru Orimono Company jibes with the data that I gathered among weavers in Nishijin. A roll of *obi* embellished with uncomplicated designs can be finished by a weaver using the power loom in one to two days and an average of three days for an *obi* with complex designs. The cost of labor for each completed woven roll is 10,000 yen and 15,000 yen respectively. In average the weaver finishes four rolls in a week or three rolls for *obi* with complex designs. Thus a weaver could earn an average gross monthly income of 160,000 yen to 180,000 yen, but the real income is even less because the cost of labor paid by weaver to hired warp tiers and harness construction experts per new loom set-up are still be to deducted. The actual take home pay can even be less when the monthly electric bill plus frequent maintenance and repair of power looms are also deducted. It is not a wonder then that the younger generation do not gravitate to being the successors of their parents as power loom Nishijin weavers. In a survey conducted by the Nishijin Labor Union, 23.3 percent of all textile-related companies notified that they have no successors to manage and continue the operation of the company, and 64.8 percent said that they are closing down.

The Problems and Issues

From discussion meetings and interviews with people involved in the production and dissemination of textiles at Nishijin—weavers, dyers, warpers, pattern makers and designers, labor union officers, *yūzen* artists, company owners, textile shop owners, wholesalers, academics (professors and students), critics, and museum curators—the various general and specific problems and issues besetting the production and dissemination were identified, and articulated, and possible solutions and new directions were offered and discussed.

The prolonged economic depression, changes in lifestyles and fashion, and the outsourcing of labor are being viewed as basic problems and issues at Nishijin. The specific problems and issues include the ageing of people in the production and management, stale patterns and designs, coping with rapid changes in computer technology, undefined marketing strategies, and insufficient and vague administrative cultural policies of the government on the propagation, cultivation and protection of

traditional crafts and arts, among others.

Basic Problem 1

It is clearly discernible from the above facts and figures that the increase and decrease in the volume of production approximated and echoed the nation's so called "bubble economy" that marked robust growth from the late 70s and a steeping climb in the decade of the 80s until 1993, when it slid unabated and came to a standstill in these early years of the twenty-first century. In parallel situation, the traditional textile art-craft and industry of Nishijin ballooned to its fullest in the 80s reaching a plateau in 1987, only to fall in a thud in 1993 and then deflate in slow excruciating fashion. But the economy is not all to blame in the waning interest in donning the pair of *obi* and kimono. The Expo '70 held in Osaka is often mentioned by people in the textile industry as the nodal mark when the Western attire of skirts and blouses, dresses, overcoats, suits and wedding gowns gained unprecedented popularity among the populace. From then on the use of kimono and *obi* as casual attire among women has rapidly decreased.

The economic depression has lingered on like an open wound unable to heal by itself and so a minus zero growth rate. Finding full-time jobs—especially for women—is getting more difficult thus unemployment rate has hovered around 4-5 percent the past five years (1999-2004). Definitely the gloomy economic condition constitutes a basic problem that has to be reversed so that the Nishijin textile tradition can breathe new life.

The most rational solution presented is the immediate diversion or redirection of government concerns and budgetary resources from the unproductive involvement in the Iraq War or occupation, and the incessant beefing up of military defense forces including the continued maintenance of foreign military bases in the country for the subsidy, protection, revitalization, and propagation of traditional arts and crafts. These can be achieved through short and long term action programs that include: (1) education and training of youthful craftsmen on the traditional and new technologies in the production process; (2) conducting research on materials—yarns and dyestuffs, and product development in order to infuse youthful spirit and fresh ideas in the industry; and (3) provide economic perks such as reduced tax payments, higher pensions, plus complete insurance benefits to all art-craft teachers, craftsmen and artists—independent or attached to companies.

The above expressed proposal may appear as a futuristic tinkering with a seemingly fixed multitude of stars along the avenues of the universe like an anime adventure on the milky way, or it may sound like a ritualistic performance where military tanks, bomber planes, and missile launchers are crushed, pulverized, and melted then transformed into robotic machines with AIs (artificial intelligence) for super-versatile textile processing from spinning to design patterning, and loom weaving to finishing. Indeed, this would be less surreal than the unceremonious melting of handcrafted cooking pots, tea pots, and steel-framed power looms that were recast into military armaments, bayonets, guns, tora-toras, and tanks that perished hundreds and thousands of lives in east and southeast Asia during the ignominious years of World War II.

The above proposal can be realized through a unified and concerted action by every government agency (trade and industry, culture science and technology, tourism, foreign affairs, among others) and every person concerned about the situation of Kyoto arts and crafts. With the Nichibunken Research Team as the vanguard think tank, a draft-ordinance to the above effect can be put forward to the legislative council of the city government for enactment with utmost urgency.

Basic Problem 2

Ever since the Meiji period undertook reforms toward thorough industrialization through the adaptation of Western technology and theories, people's lifestyles inevitably and gradually veered toward the modern and the cosmopolitan. The capitalist system of production meant mechanized factory production of goods in commercial quantity and fast paced if not cut-throat competition. In this system, time is always of the essence so that the faster one goes the better. Thus a world of machines, high tech gadgets, conveyors, escalators, fast cars, motorcycles, trains and bicycles, necessitate practicality in fashion. So that trousers and jeans, coats and jackets, skirts and blouses are more practical, convenient, and definitely more fashionable than the traditional kimono get-up with the designs, form and cut approximating Haronubu's *Ladies Watching the Full Moon*, a polychrome print dated 1769. Aside from the kimono's delicate and soft material, putting on the *obi* is difficult and time consuming. Today's kimono wrap can be too tight fitting, prohibiting long rapid strides or wide movements to negotiate a flight of stairs, ride a bike, or drive a car, and too expensive to maintain or clean when soiled. And above

all the price of one pair of kimono and *obi* can be too prohibitive to a consuming public.

What can be done as solutions to the foregoing stated problem are the following suggestions: design and undertake research programs on people's lifestyles covering all sectors of society as the basis for the creation of new designs and patterns that are more expressive of contemporary mood and spirit, and also for reformulating the kimono-*obi* tandem as a casual attire that allows easier movement of the body yet retaining the overall aesthetic lines of the kimono. (The manager of the Murata Kimono Shop at Gion suggests a lessening of the waistline fold and a shortening of the sleeves approximating the Momoyama period style); create multiple choices in terms of materials and designs for various occasions with corresponding levels in pricing to cater to clienteles at specific income groups (as expressed in unison by several *toiya-san* and *tsuzure* artists); include in high school curricula a short course on the traditional art-crafts, with particular focus on the aesthetics of wearing the kimono and *hakama* in this era of cyberspace technology; and launch more effective marketing/dissemination strategies such as appointing a youthful heart-throb as promotions model for various types of kimono-wear appearing in fashion magazines and primetime TV shows, and popularize the new modern kimono styles in the main characters of anime and manga to capture the youth market. A status quo in style for the very traditional kimono attires in very specific functions or occasions such as the *tomesode* for attire of relatives in wedding ceremonies, the *furisode* for coming-of-age day celebration for twenty-year old girls, the ceremonial get-up for children in the *shichi-go-san* shrine visits, and the *hakama* get-up for university graduation ceremonies. The *hakama* carries high prospects for popular fashion. It can be redesigned for casual fashionable wear by named Japanese fashion designer/s and launched as THE modern get-up for yuppies and teens of the twenty-first century in Japan and in the international community.

Basic Problem 3

The outsourcing of labor or contractualization of foreign labor was reportedly practiced at a very limited extent by a number of Nishijin companies as early as the 1980s, or more than two decades ago when the economic bubble burst, was already a foreseen occurrence. Today in this age of "globalization" outsourcing of labor is the norm. So that nowadays when buying *omiyage* (umbrellas, fans, *furoshiki*, hankies, and dolls) for people back home it would be very difficult to find real Japan-made

goods. For it can be surprising to learn that those tagged as Japan-made may not even be in truth Japan-made. The supposedly traditional Japanese items such as lacquer wares may be foreign-made after all! And Nishijin textiles are no exceptions to this weird "practice" or trend. In around 1983, Japanese textile entrepreneurs were already operating a weaving house for *obi* production in Cebu city, the capital of Cebu Island in the Visayas, Philippines as mentioned by a Filipino scholar in her M.A. thesis in Anthropology (Calderon 1984). Then sometime in 1992, Kyoto-based entrepreneurs contracted local weavers in an island in Western Visayas, which is the weaving center for pineapple fiber cloths in the Philippines. The weavers were made to produce rolls and rolls of cloth from the precious fiber materials which were then marketed in Japan as *obi*. The pineapple fiber cloths had designs woven in either the *tsuzure* or in *hanaori* technique. Some others were intricately embellished with hand-embroidered designs. The resistance of the weavers to the factory-work environment caused the partnership to last for only a couple of years. Yet again, this year, another group of Kyoto-based entrepreneurs have established new arrangements with the Visayan pineapple fiber weavers for the production of *obi*, kimono, and shawls. This is in disregard of a standing directive from a government agency in-charge of fiber development prohibiting (for a period of time) foreign entrepreneurial activities on the endangered pineapple plant variety from which the fibers are sourced. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Kyoto *yuzen* kimono companies have been sub-contracting the labor and expertise of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino craftsmen who specialize in the "drawn thread technique" creating alternating void spaces or what is known as *leyno* design in weaving, on silk cloths, and later brush-dyed with floral designs by *yuzen* artists.

According to a 2004 report by a Kyoto economic research center, there are 247 Kyoto companies that out source 34 percent of the production process in China, representing a 10 percent increase from the year 2000. Of the outsourced production, 54 percent involves traditional industry with 16 percent of it on textile production. The actual percentage can even reach a high of 70-80 percent, as intimated to me by an officer of the Japan Agency in Textile Conservation. Labor union members and an official assail the practice as a question of morals and ethics in traditional crafts and art production. A wholesaler who recently took early retirement because of some irreconcilable disputes with management on marketing practices and strategies of the textile trading firm laments the practice of labor outsourcing as a "lack of hearts" among textile company managers and capitalists. Yet such a direction

and (now) a growing practice among textile companies in Nishijin can only be an inevitable fate of a creative endeavor that has grown into an industry ever since Nishijin textile production embraced a fully mechanized/automated production process. The traditional production process of traditional crafts and art could only go commercialized and mass produced in the system of capitalist production and take the expressway to labor outsourcing in a "globalized" or multi-national capitalist production. Capitalist production system negates moral and ethical issues in lieu of profits. Yet there can be a way to minimize or even abet the unethical and immoral practice.

The suggested moves are: (a) strict and truthful labeling of productions such that labels should include not just the materials—percentages of fibers and dyestuffs used, and instructions on the care, maintenance, or washing, but also the following: identity of company and place/country of production, name(s) of person/people involved in the production process such as the weaver, dyer, designer, and pattern maker; the year of production; and a brief literature on the history, meaning, and significance of the design and technique/s used. All the foregoing endeavors should be strictly practiced to acknowledge the skills of every person involved in the production and assign full responsibility and credit in the production to the textile company. Educating the buying public on the specifics of the production is an important responsibility of the producer or manufacturer. Moreover, it is always a delight to client-buyers to know about the properties of the cloth and history of the design and technique/s. (b) Aside from the foregoing, a system for the protection of intellectual property rights on textile designs, patterns, and techniques should be formulated and enforced to further give due recognition to the artist-craftsmen and protection to their respective creative endeavors.

What about the problem of succession of textile crafts, artisans, and managers? A sensible solution voiced out by Nishijin people is the establishment of Nishijin special learning centers or workshops where young people go through rigorous training and apprenticeship under appointed master craftsmen or artisans in the community following a curricular program drawn out by a Union committee. The program should include learning and mastery of traditional techniques in all processes of production, designing, history, and aesthetics, and computerized patterning/drafting. The learning centers could be managed by the Textile Union but fully subsidized by the city government so that all expenses such as materials—

yarn, dyestuffs, tools, looms, training space, attractive salary of the master-trainers and apprentices—are provided for by the government. A quota of trainees (at least ten per curricular program) should be imposed. Textile companies and entrepreneurs with five or more artisan/craftsmen involved in the production should be also obliged to implement an apprenticeship system. The foregoing along with a revival of sericulture and silk yarn processing could surely redound to the revitalization of the tradition.

Epilogue

A cultural anthropologist conducting research in the area predicts, without batting an eyelash, that the Nishijin textile tradition will vanish and will just remain a part of the glorious Kyoto history a decade or a couple of decades from now. An Osaka-based economist formerly in the international yarn trade thinks otherwise. He believes that the centuries long history of the tradition now on its 538th year (this 2005) is a solid formidable foundation that can neither be swept away nor be toppled down by a hegemonizing political-economic tsunami known by the by-word, globalization. A good friend, Mrs. Nakamura Akiko, who is a fourth generation kimono weaver at Nishijin, had already foreseen the dissipation of the tradition in the late 60s, yet she continues to create textiles and teach others through her weaving workshops. Her father too is indefatigable in working on new technology in loom weaving and harness construction. Exactly, theirs are the true spirit and ideology of Nishijin that without a pinch of doubt will carry the tradition (in new forms and expressions) way past the twenty-first century.

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(Note: The articles by Yamaguchi Akira were most comprehensive and were heavily relied upon, especially on the early history of the Nishijin tradition.)

2004-2005. Various interviews with power loom weavers (Ms. Hashido, Mrs. Seki and Ms. Tatebayashi), dyers (Mr. and Mrs, Miyagawa, Mr. Tokunaga and Mrs. Uemura), warper (Mr. Sawada), artist-designers (Mr. Tatsumura K., Mr. Onagi and Mr. Gyoza), pattern makers (Mr. Yachi and Mr. Kajiwara), loom maker (Mr. Nishimura), harness constructors ()Mr. Nakamura Yuichiro and family), *tsuzure* artists (Prof. Hosomi and Mrs. Kodama), *kinran* weavers (Ms. Yamaguchi, Mr. Shibagaki and the Nagase-san siblings), velvet weaver (Mr. Kojima), *yuzen* artists (Mr. Ogawa, Mr. Hamashima, Mr. Kitamura, Mr. Gojo and the Marumasu Nishimuraya artists), labor union officers (Mr. Matsushita and Mrs. Hashido), yarn trader/economist (Mr. Omori), textile company managers (Mr. Maizuru, Mr. Nishiyama, Mr. Nishimura and Mr. Yamazaki), textile shop managers (Mrs. Wakita, Mrs. Nakasaki and Mr. Tajima), sales persons (Ms. Taniguchi, Mr. Otani, Ms. Yamazaki and wholesaler Mr. Furukawa), tea masters (Mrs. Furukawa Masako, Dr. Matsumura, and Mr. Yamaguchi), economist (Prof. Wada), academics (Prof. Kawakami, Prof. Hiroi, Prof. Namiki, Prof. Miyahara, Prof. Yoshida, Prof. Mori, Prof. Yamaguchi, and Prof. Shigematsu), undergraduate and graduate students (Ms. Kataoka, Ms. Kobayashi, Mr. Mizukami and Ms. Sawamura), researchers (Dr. Kitagawa, Ms. Nagahara, Mr. Murayama and Ms. Ito), cultural worker (Ms.

Furukawa Ai), leading traditional textile advocate (Mr. Yamada), and museum curators (Ms. Yamakawa, Ms. Goto, and Prof. Domyo) conducted from November 2004 to October 2005 mostly in their places of work in Kyoto, Osaka, and Hyogo. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were translated into English by Ms. Hatanaka Sayuri, a researcher at Nichibunken and graduate student of Osaka University, Ms. Yamada Miyo, a junior Fine Arts student at Kyoto City University of Fine Arts, Ms. Yamoto Kimi, a graduate student at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, and Mrs. Nakamura Akiko, a weaver at Nishijin. Mrs. Nakamura accompanied me to the workshops of Nishijin weavers and artisans while Yamada-san and Yamoto-san also served as research assistants.

Fig. 1 A kimono sale festival held at Hankyū Department Store, Osaka; a Ton'ya-san unrolls an *obi* for the clients to view and appreciate.

Fig. 2 A sticker on the control panel of a taxi informs of a 10% discount on the meter fare of passengers wearing kimono attire.

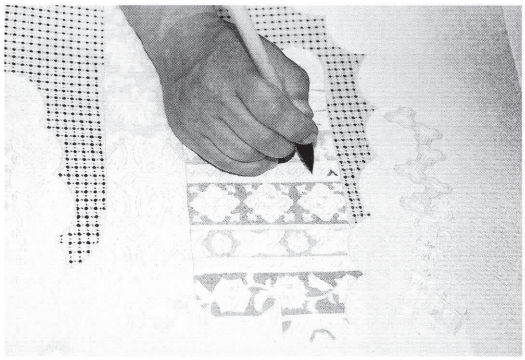

Fig. 3 A silk cloth worked on by a *yūzen* craftsman shows a multi-textured crepe ground with floral patterns. Areas with gauze-like forms or a neat grid of holes and tiny floral patterns are done in China.

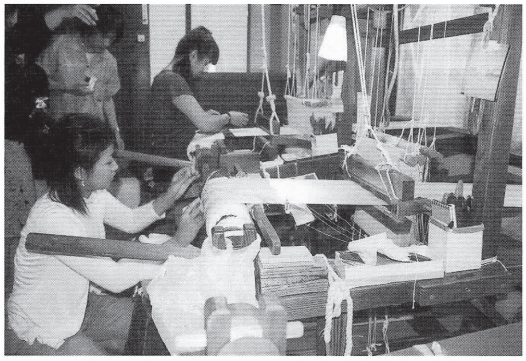

Fig. 4 Highly skilled lady weavers in the Hosomi Tsuzure Kōbō; Ms. Itō Junko in the foreground adjusts the tautness of the warp in the handloom.

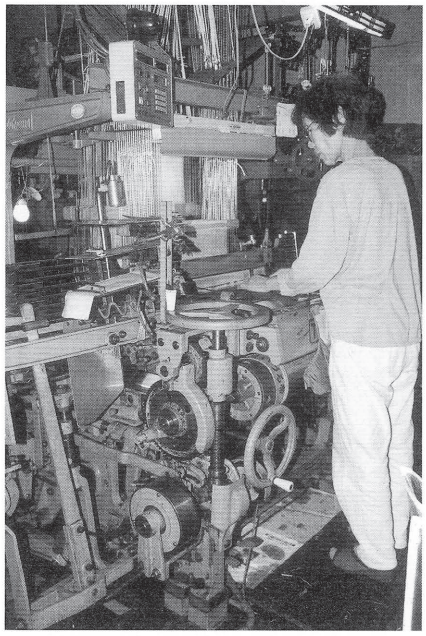

Fig. 5 Ms. Hashido Emiko keeps close watch at the production of her power loom in their family workshop. The machine is fitted with ten pairs of shuttles and designs are read from a floppy disk.

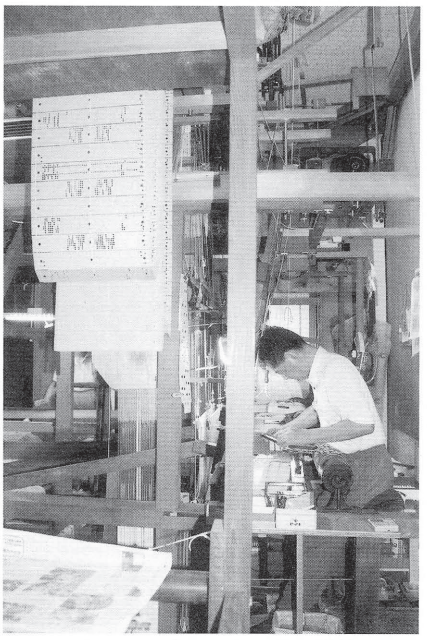

Fig. 6 A *kinran* weaver is intent at work in Murai-san's *kōbō* specializing in textiles for Honganji temple. The roll of pattern cards provides the sequence in the production of designs.

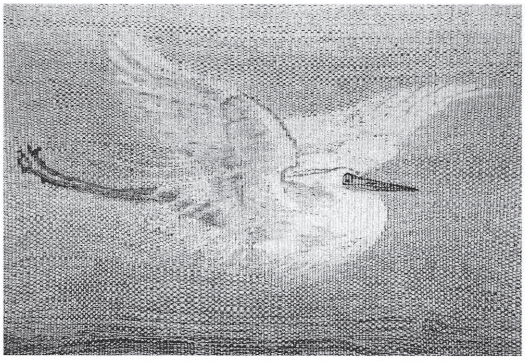

Fig. 7 A crane in flight is one of the favorite productions by Prof. Hosomi, Ningen Kokuhō artist in the *tsuzure* technique. Subtle and delicate with undulating ground, the work exhibits a style as if done with the artist's brush.

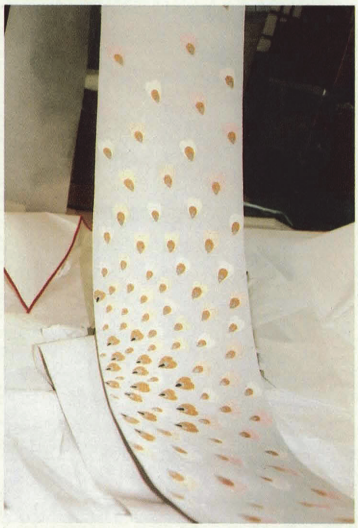

Fig. 8 Abbreviated feathers of the peacock are featured in the *obi* design by Prof. Hosomi, Ningen Kokuhō artist in the *tsuzure* technique. The semi-radial grouping and gold-white-pink colors express regal yet delicate radiance.

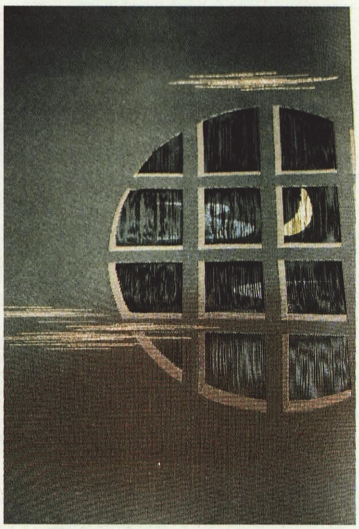

Fig. 9 A *shōji*-styled window with the half-moon and undulating stream peering through is the featured design on an *obi* by *tsuzure* artist Mrs. Shisen Kodama. The precise grid highlighting the ledges of the *shōji* provide interesting contrast to the hazy forms and sketchy lines.

Fig.10 An *obi* design by *tsuzure* artist, Mrs. Shisen Kodama, shows a courtier in a carriage on an undulating ground of pastel colors representing the road and stream with a sprinkling of flowers, insects, and gold leaf. The work recalls the yamato-e style of the 12th and 13th centuries. As if done in brush, the gradated shade of black and sketchy lines depicting the wheel and cursive writings demonstrate the artist's impeccable skills in the *tsuzure* technique.

Fig.11 A design-theme referring to Zhou bronze vessels features the hooked geometric lines of thunder-lightning against striped colors of gold and oxidized green. The design is a weave from the Tatsumura Kōbō Textile Company.

Fig.12 A design depicting the Chinese mythical pair of dragon cubs tangled in a dance is an oft repeated theme in Shōsōin textiles. This work from the Tatsumura Kōhō Textile Company shows the cubs freed from the usual roundrel-composition for a refreshing and graceful elegant imagery.

Fig.13 A tiger posed for a kill is the subject of a wall hanging in velvet weave. The composition and design details are produced through ruled-cutting technique by Mr. Kojima Mikio, hopefully not the last of the velvet weavers in Nishijin.